30 04 88
TL 1244

tapol
The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign

111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR4 8HW. Tel: 01-771 2904 Telex: 933524 REF GEO2:TAPOL

Honorary President: Lord Avebury; Honorary Treasurer: Tom Soper; Organising Secretary: Carmel Budiardjo

Summary of diplomatic offensive by Indonesia's new Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas

Within two weeks of taking office, the new Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, Indonesia's former ambassador at the UN in New York, has taken several diplomatic offensives. In an interview with **Tempo**, a leading Indonesian weekly, Ali Alatas admitted that Indonesian foreign policy would change from 'low profile' to 'high profile', though stressed that everything depended on the contribution Indonesia can make in seeking solutions to specific problems. His style promises to be more straightforward and direct than his predecessor Mochtar. He said: "In my experience, banging on the table is occasionally necessary." (**Tempo**,16 April 1988).

Besides trying to find a solution to the Kampuchea conflict, Ali Alatas has defined three priority areas in the near future, East Timor, the non-aligned movement (NAM) and a diplomatic offensive in the Asia-Pacific region.

It has now become clear that the bad relations between ex-Foreign Minister Mochtar and General Benny Murdani as commander-in-chief of ABRI (Indonesian Armed Forces) hindered many Indonesian diplomatic initiatives in the past. Ali Alatas is believed to have a good relationship with General Benny Murdani and can therefore be expected to proceed with his diplomatic offensives free from criticisms and sabotage from Murdani, who still holds a position of great power.

The East Timor issue

Ali Alatas admits that the East Timor is still a major hindrance for Indonesia in international affairs. It has created "many misunderstandings and misconceptions, even among our allies, thus creating difficulties in our diplomatic work".**Tempo**, (16 April 1988). He is determined to finish with this issue "once and for all". This can only mean that Indonesia is now prepared to go for a 'showdown' in New York, and will not be satisfied any more with yearly postponements of a vote at the General Assembly. Alatas said recently that a triangular dialogue has been under way in New York for the removal of the East Timor issue from the UN agenda. **Jakarta Post** (25 March 1988). This was apparently a reference to the talks between Indonesia and Portugal under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, but these talks are not intended to remove the issue from the UN agenda.

Another Indonesian initiative aimed at improving its position over East Timor is the recent approach made by the Indonesian embassy in London to Stan Newens, Labour Party MEP who

has been a consistent critic of Indonesia since 1965. The approach came soon after a bitter clash at the European Parliament's Political Affairs Committee, of which Stan is a member, over an East Timor draft resolution. The embassy suggested that he might be invited to visit East Timor. Perhaps, Jakarta is casting around for politicians who, if convinced about conditions in East Timor might have greater credibility among its critics than discredited journalists like Nuno Rocha. Also, they need to lobby hard against the East Timor resolution which will shortly be submitted to the European Parliament.

The NAM movement

The NAM movement can be a very important instrument in the achievement of Indonesia's diplomatic aims. President Suharto sees the chairmanship of NAM as a kind of pinacle for his career as statesman. One of the reasons why Mochtar was removed from office was his failure to bring the NAM conference to Jakarta. Indonesia's first bid to host an NAM summit was made in Luanda in 1985 but at that time the objection was that the previous summit had taken place in another Asian country, India, and it would have meant holding two summits in succesion in Asia. In the end Zimbabwe became the venue.

In Harare, Indonesia sent a huge delegation to try to convince delegates that Indonesia should be next in turn. Already then it was clear that Indonesia was not the only candidate as Daniel Ortega from Nicaragua also put forward his candidacy.

In a move to improve Indonesia's chances both at the NAM and on East Timor, Indonesia has now announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and Cyprus, where the forthcoming NAM foreign ministers meeting is to be held in September. **Kompas** (13 April 1988). Alatas recently claimed that Indonesia and Nicaragua had agreed to support each other in their respective bids for NAM chairmanship (though whether they agreed on who should come first is not clear). When announcing the new diplomatic ties, it was also explained that Indonesia intends to expand diplomatic ties with the countries of Black Africa and Central and Latin America in order to improve its support at the UN.

It is always stressed that there is no fixed procedure regarding the choice of the NAM host country, only a general agreement that it rotates between the three continents, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Until now the chair of NAM has always been chosen by acclamation meaning that both Indonesia and Nicaragua, each with their opponents at the NAM, will face difficulties in their respective bids. According to Victoria Brittain in the **Guardian** recently, the most likely candidate is Alan Garcia of Peru, the current hero of many third world countries facing enormous debts. Be that as it may, Alatas has made it clear that NAM chairmanship for Suharto is very much on his agenda although during his last months in office, Mochtar had clearly given up trying.

Asia-Pacific region

In the Broad Lines of State Policy formulated every 5 years, Indonesia has, for the first time, decided to put a focus on the South Pacific region, in particular Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands, PNG and Vanuatu. "We must make sure that they have a proper understanding (of our policies)," explains Alatas. The tendency to 'look eastwards' is a recent phenomena and only became more apparent after Indonesia's two trouble-spots, West Papua and East Timor began attracting criticism from Pacific countries. It is not yet clear whether Alatas has worked out a new strategy so we will have wait to see how this develops.

The only direct results of Indonesian diplomacy in the South Pacific so far can be seen in PNG and Fiji. Murdani has been publicly exposed for giving bribes to key political figures in PNG politics while Indonesia started aiding Fiji financially immediately after the second Rabuka coup.

London, 25 April 1988